reason

SOVIET UNION

National Suicide

JAMES MARTIN | FROM THE NOVEMBER 1976 ISSUE

National Suicide: Military Aid to the Soviet Union, by Antony Sutton, New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1973, 289 pp., $8.95.

In 1937 and 1938 I was employed as a paper handler in a major magazine printing factory. The most interesting member of the gang could, over a glass or two of *grappa* when the shift was over, be induced to talk rather animatedly about his experiences in Soviet Russia a decade earlier, installing in Communist textile mills the famous knitting machines produced in a small New Hampshire city. It was my first near-direct contact with the subject involved in a more special fashion in Antony C. Sutton's *National Suicide: Military Aid to the Soviet Union.*

In one sense the supply of any product to someone construed as an enemy can be designated as of ultimate military consequence, as in the British blockade against Napoleon, for instance. It may therefore be rather sophistical to discriminate between the supply of machine guns as against prosaic foodstuffs, which can be even more crucial in determining the efficient staying power of an enemy's *entire* armed forces, or textile machinery, which makes possible the adequate clothing of his total population. Even toys may be defined as "war goods" as a consequence of their potential contribution to armament workers' morale and productivity via pacification of their children. The point in raising these matters is that Sutton's book provokes far more questions than it answers.

Sutton's account of the tidal wave of engineering genius and products from the United States to the U.S.S.R. is impressive, though one might become confused as to whose "suicide" he is suggesting—among those supplying the Soviets with military and naval muscle are most of the other industrial countries of the world as well.

He also is not clear anywhere as to which segment of the American system is responsible for this. At one place he charges the executive: "All presidential administrations, from that of Woodrow Wilson to that of Richard Nixon, have followed a bipartisan foreign policy of building up the Soviet Union." In other places he finds the State and Commerce Departments the key factors, and at still another the Congress is found to be making the basic decisions resulting in massive supply of strategic goods to the U.S.S.R.

Though he names scores of firms involved in this enterprise, Sutton is extremely gentle in dealing with Big Business and Big Finance, forces that surely have more than casual impact on this program. (The entry of Big Agriculture into the picture is a recent development, though the pressure to engage in massive grain exports to the Communists is the most obvious of all the "special interests" in action.)

News that Americans were building the largest truck manufacturing plant in the world a few hundred miles east of Moscow on the Kama River was followed early this year by a release from the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, listing nearly 600 major firms now trading with Soviet

Russia. The firms are fronted by a prestigious committee of 26 top figures in U.S. business and finance, including the heads of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, General Motors, General Electric, IBM, and Dupont, along with the chief executive officers of the Bank of America and Chase Manhattan Bank. The magnitude of this suggests that Sutton has so far barely scraped the surface of it all. In the railing about bureaucrats and politicians we invariably evade the fact that the overwhelming majority of such figures come from the industrial, commercial, and financial world, and their dossiers are frequently complicated by legal and military experience as well.

It is no wonder that attempts to analyze things of this sort with ideological stereotypes of "right wing" and "left wing" are worthless most of the time. "Internationalism" in the United States is erected upon a solid bipartisan structure of several decades of existence, both wings of which flap in unison ("Politics stops at the water's edge") when the subject of "America's role in the world" is on the agenda. This may take form in the visible efforts of giant contractors such as Bechtel or Brown & Root, which a few years ago undertook to cover South Vietnam with concrete, or the invisible efforts of a modest Colorado firm that is actually the world's largest international mover of household goods and enjoys a near-monopoly of the business of moving the families of American military personnel from one country to another, an enterprise now approaching nine figures annually.

One of the most mystifying aspects of Sutton's study concerns how the tens of billions of dollars of equipment shipped to Soviet Russia has been and is paid for. Most foreign trade consists of the exchange of goods for goods, with just the balances paid for in money. But Professor Paul W. McCracken, one-time chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors to the White House, tells us in the *Wall Street Journal* (Feb. 23, 1976) that the United States imports as much from Peru as it does from the U.S.S.R., a veritable petty-cash operation. (Outside of phonograph records or Polish hams, when was the last time you even *saw* a Communist product, let alone bought one?) An economy still making 1881 apartments and 1942 automobiles for home use is hardly going to make much of an impact on the sophisticated buying habits of Americans. At the recent 25th Soviet Communist Party Congress in Moscow, administrators from various of the Soviet "republics" complained of the incredibly bad quality of Soviet civilian consumer goods production and flatly asserted that less than five percent of it could possibly pass the critical eye of a buyer in the capitalist world. So again we come to the payment problem. Is this Himalaya of American products paid for in gold? If in U.S. dollars, where would the Soviet acquire such immense quantities of American currency? From sales to the Arab world? Or is the final bill being passed off silently and expertly to the American taxpayer via schemes that are not explained to us ordinary citizens?

I have my own theory: perhaps international corporations accept, in return, titles to Soviet property through some arcane arrangements. If this were true, the former might acquire a vested interest in both sides and act as a brake on precipitation of war between them. One can understand the psychic gains that accrue from reiterated devotion to planetary amity based on beatitudinal exhortations, but is it not possible that fervent interest in the preservation of "international peace" might be based on other than intangible considerations?

The emphasis in Sutton's book is on weaponry, however. The supply to the Reds of arms of varying sophistication stirs counter-concern about the state and shape of U.S. arms and has stimulated a vast uproar in this election year. It has been exploited by a sturdy contingent, especially complaining about matters naval and nuclear. We are told that governmental parsimony has resulted in the U.S. Navy becoming recognizably inferior to that of the U.S.S.R. (even though Representative Aspin asserts that more is being spent on the Navy than before.) Adm. Elmo R. Zumwalt has published in his recent memoirs. *On Watch,* that our 1972 nuclear arms limitation agreement with the Communists has put us in an inferior relationship with them with respect to various submarine-launched ballistic missiles and strategic submarines themselves. And several pundits have expounded on the ease with which the new Kama River truck plant and the vast Gorky auto factory built by Ford Motor can be programmed to turn out tanks.

Topping it off is the caution about Soviet Russia's alleged space superiority uttered earlier in 1976 by Werner von Braun, the spokesman for an interest group now shrunk to less than half its manpower in the heyday of the Apollo program. His remarks excited memories of Kennedy's famous "missile gap" oratory in 1960 while campaigning against Nixon. It was not long after Kennedy's victory that the "gap" was admitted with some graciousness to be a fraud.

There is no doubt that incurring anxiety about the state of "national defense" can result in stimulating a lot of business in some sectors of heavy industry. Some investment analysts have begun to cool it with respect to such things as stashing away gold and are recommending shares in armament and "defense" companies, which stand to make billions in the coming years. But there are some thinly discussed aspects of the total situation. What of a modern tank, costing hundreds of thousands of dollars or more, when it becomes vulnerable to a hand-held, mass-produced, surface-to-surface missile, costing as little as a thousand dollars? The deadly accuracy of these in the hands of infantrymen in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war is believed to have changed the mind of the late Marshal Grechko, Soviet Minister of Defense, on the wisdom of vast tank forces in the future. The vulnerability of even jet planes to the heat-seeking cousins of these antitank weapons should be causing similar concern about the future of all human-guided military aircraft.

Now, there is usually little speculation about constant technological revolutions and their impact upon given power structures based on armaments. Most thinking of conventional military and political people, at least in public, is in terms of the weapons of the last war with which they are familiar. Most limitations agreements concern already-familiar or already-stocked martial hardware and almost never even *mention* current research on something different or curbs on the evolution of weapons not yet introduced, employed, or stockpiled.

Sutton's study of the U.S.-U.S.S.R. military scene is entirely in harmony with the above, backward glance. He totally excludes the subject of lasers, which should have entered his work somewhere, and as such manages to escape all considerations of weapons being worked on *now* and intended for the future. He is anything but alone when it comes to this silence. *Science News* (January 3, 1976, p. 5) remarked that "the general press has been surprisingly quiet about recent advances in laser weaponry," even failing to comment on such items of this nature which *SN* had reported on in previous issues. Leonid Brezhnev had mentioned in his May 1975 policy speech "the serious danger of the creation of a weapon even more awesome than the nuclear one," and the chief Soviet delegate to the Geneva disarmament talks late in February 1976 spoke of "new types of weapons of mass destruction." But it was not until *Jane's Weapons Systems 1976* began to get around that it was revealed generally that the United States and the U.S.S.R. are "locked in a costly 'super-scientific' struggle" to bring into existence a family of practical laser weapons.

Lowell Ponte, identified by *Science News* (January 31, 1976, p. 67) as "a former arms control analyst and author of many Pentagon nuclear weapons studies," had already broken the ice on the subject of lasers in a spectacular way with two articles published in the Freedom newspaper chain in the early summer of 1972. According to Ponte these new combat tools are as superior to atomic bombs as atomic bombs had been to dynamite. The logic of his observations is that the arms limitation talks might just as well have concerned the production of maces, broadswords, and arquebuses and restrictions on the use of Greek Fire.

Ponte's revelations were surely on the sensational side. The public reaction was nearly *nil,* but he stirred up the animals in various branches of the Defense Department, which led to some interesting talks and interviews on radio and some labored efforts to diminish the importance of his material.

Ponte discussed the Special Weapons Laboratory at Kirkland Air Force Base near Albuquerque, where the first working model of a laser weapon was put together in 1960, down to the modern laser testing range located there in 1971, where scientists were several times daily destroying targets two miles distant with 60,000 watt "gas dynamic" laser guns. He pointed out that the Defense Department had invested in laser research to the tune of hundreds of millions, for years, both openly and secretly, and that the laser-*directed* arms used at the closing of the Vietnam war were simply teasers, "a smokescreen to hide what we have." He went on to say that a laser had been perfected as far back as 1969 that could produce "shock waves" with a force of 10,000,000 kilos per square centimeter and that much had happened in research along such lines since that time. He further astounded the knowledgeable by insisting that matter-energy scramblers, along the lines of the "phaser" used in the science-fiction TV show "Star Trek," were now not far in the future, based on paired, phased lasers working on "the resonant levels in matter." To the objection of a government scientist that clouds, bad weather, and mirrors could be used to render lasers ineffective, Ponte responded that these conditions or things could not be made to act as a defense against lasers that are "able to resonate with atoms or molecules in the target." And in his closing remarks in the first of his two articles, Ponte declared that laser technology had not only made nuclear weapons obsolete; it made "a world of armies and borders as helpless as the invention of gunpowder made a society dependent upon hilltop castles."

National Suicide is a valuable book on the record of military aid to Communist Russia down to fairly recent years but can be of little value in the present situation. And it has almost none with respect to the likely dynamics of future military scientific statecraft involving the Soviet, despite the intent that the book have serious current importance. While Earl Butz and his emissaries among the major grain exporters tied in with Big Agriculture negotiate the shipment of millions of tons of wheat to the U.S.S.R. (paid for with what?) and work out deals for even bigger deliveries scheduled for several years to come, the American populace is mollified with press handouts to the effect that the Feds are cracking down on the proposed shipment of "sophisticated electronic manufacturing equipment" to these same recipients (Associated Press story, April 28, 1976). But one notices that the firms hit with this no-no are "little guys," not the likes of Litton Industries or Texas Instruments.

One may also speculate, in the light of both Sutton and Ponte, whether there is a traffic in obsolescent laser research and development from the United States to the U.S.S.R., as there has been in the past with other weapons systems, enabling the game to be kept going but always in the same order of the race, with the Soviets plodding along in the rear though occasionally reported to be out front. Part of the domestic game played with the general citizenry consists of scaring them with projections of Communist Russia and its threatened industrial and military might. (Japan, with a third of Russia's people, has an equal capital investment and two-thirds of its GNP.)

It is said that Theodore Roosevelt, recalling the Spanish-American war years later, commented wistfully that "it wasn't much of a war, but it was the only war we had." In the same spirit, one might observe that, as second rate as Soviet Russia is, it is the only planetary demon we have.

James J. Martin received his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Michigan. He is the author of a number of works of revisionist history, including American Liberalism and World Politics, *and he recently edited (with Leonard Liggio) a collection of essays on New Deal foreign policy,* Watershed of Empire.

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